



**Department of
Education**

Joel I. Klein, Chancellor

**Quality Review Report
Office of Accountability
2008-2009**

Quality Review Report 2008-2009

Sojourner Truth School

Elementary-Middle School 149

**41 West 117 Street
New York
NY 10026**

Principal: Shaniquia Dixon

Dates of review: December 8 - 9, 2008

Lead Reviewer: Roser Salavert

Part 1: The school context

Information about the school

Sojourner Truth School is an elementary-middle school with 476 students from pre-kindergarten through grade 8. The school population comprises 78% Black, 19% Hispanic, 1% White, and 2% Asian students. The student body includes 8% English language learners and 8% special education students. Boys account for 48% of the students enrolled and girls account for 52%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2007-2008 was 90.3%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 65% eligibility.

Overall Evaluation

This school is proficient.

The principal has provided strong leadership in creating a vision for the school and developing a collaborative culture that has resulted in a welcoming and safe learning environment and higher student performance. School faculty, parents and students share a sense of urgency to achieve higher levels of proficiency, and students display a very positive attitude towards learning.

The school is increasingly driven by data gathering and analysis to understand individual students' strengths and areas of needs. However, it took the unexpected results of the latest Progress Report for the school to engage in a deeper analysis of formative and summative assessments and how they are used to inform classroom practices. Although there is extensive use of data, school leaders and teachers have yet to develop enough familiarity with some of the assessments in place at the school to give a rationale on their use or to integrate data from different sources to analyze fully the progress of students, particularly student subgroups and higher performing students.

Teachers working with school leaders have established long-term and short-term goals for subgroups but these goals are only defined in general proficiency levels or standards. Similarly, teachers seldom define students' learning outcomes. As a result, students can articulate the level of proficiency they expect to achieve but they are not aware of what they need to do in order to achieve this level.

The school is making progress in addressing the need for differentiated instruction identified in the previous Quality Review report, but it is still an emerging practice. The use of rubrics is a school-wide practice, but the way teachers use them to guide instruction and give feedback to students is inconsistent and not always effective. The school has yet to develop strategies to ensure that high-performing students are consistently challenged to become independent learners.

Parents feel that the principal and the teachers are very supportive of their children and keep open lines of communication with them at all times. They feel welcome in the school and participate in regular training opportunities provided by the parent coordinator and school specialists. The school has also developed strong partnerships with outside organizations to provide high-quality programs to support students' academic and social development.

Part 2: Overview

What the school does well

- The principal has provided strong leadership in creating a vision for the school and is actively involving the faculty in further developing it through study groups and distributive leadership.
- The school collects and analyzes a wide range of data to understand individual students' strengths and areas of needs.
- School leaders, teachers and parents collaborate well in developing the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP).
- The principal ensures that teachers have the resources, time and professional development opportunities necessary to have a positive impact on the learning environment and improve student achievement.
- The school's core curriculum is mapped effectively and aligned to State standards, and it is enhanced by a wide range of academic and character development initiatives.
- The school has developed strong partnerships with outside organizations to provide high-quality programs to support students' academic and social development as well as parent training opportunities.

What the school needs to improve

- Review the curriculum, other than English language arts and math, to enable accurate assessments of learning and assist teachers in consistently planning to meet students' learning needs.
- Set measurable learning goals for all students and use interim checkpoints to measure their progress and accelerate learning, particularly for high-performing students.
- Further build teachers' confidence in the use of formative and summative assessments and the interpretation of assessment data so as to develop purposeful and effective differentiated instruction across grades and in all core subjects.
- Regularly assess the benefits of professional development through observations of classroom practices and their impact on student engagement, levels of participation and quality of their work.

Part 3: Main Findings

How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do and to monitor the student's progress over time.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The school has made continued progress since the principal took over approximately four years ago, and she links this improvement to the analysis and use of data. The results of this year's progress report were completely unexpected. The school's score was due to low middle school scores in English language arts and limited success in closing the achievement gap. As a result, the principal and faculty have engaged in a critical review of school practices, particularly the needs of subgroups, such as English language learners, which form the focus of the inquiry team. Another direct result of this evaluation is the school-wide use of Acuity to develop differentiated assignments and the use of running records on a calendar basis.

The principal and assistant principals keep binders with a wide range of data and teachers have subject-specific data binders in their classrooms. However, they have yet to develop enough familiarity with some of these assessments to give a rationale on their use. In addition, they do not currently integrate data from different sources to analyze fully the progress of students, particularly student subgroups and higher-performing students. The school has been awarded a middle school planning grant towards the development of a plan to address the particular needs of a subgroup in the area of science.

School faculty, parents and students share a sense of urgency to achieve higher levels of proficiency, and students display a very positive attitude towards learning. The school has a school-wide grading policy that is aligned to the State standards and rubrics are widely used in the classrooms. However, the use of portfolios and marking of written work varies from subject to subject, from teacher to teacher and from grade to grade, and it is often superficial.

The school has built a strong partnership with parents who feel that the principal and the teachers are very supportive of their children and keep open lines of communication with them at all times. The school has an effective system in place to track students' attendance and parents acknowledge that they are immediately informed if there is any concern related to attendance or lateness.

Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The principal has led the cabinet and teachers in developing a collaborative culture across the faculty that has promoted a learning environment conducive to higher performance, improved attendance and increased student enrollment. In the 2007-08 school year, the school’s sixth grade class increased from 35 to 57 students through the district-wide middle school choice process. Overall student attendance, including attendance of middle school students, continues to improve.

Teachers and assistant principals working together in academic meetings set grade level goals for students in English language arts, math, social studies and science that are based on an analysis of performance data. Interim benchmarks are available for English language arts and math but they are not consistently established across grades. Similarly, the school has established long-term and short-term goals for subgroups but these goals are only defined in general proficiency levels or standards. The school has yet to develop strategies to ensure that high performing students are consistently challenged and encouraged to become independent learners and be accountable for their own progress.

Teachers help students and monitor their progress but they seldom define their learning outcomes. As a result, students can articulate the level of proficiency they expect to achieve but they are not aware of what they need to do in order to achieve this level. In classrooms where students are encouraged to write goals for a subject, there is little evidence of reflection and limited teacher feedback. Literacy and math journals are used mostly as notebooks to copy ‘do nows’, activities and homework.

The school has high expectations for students’ character development and these expectations are equally shared by students and staff. It has adopted the ‘Nothing is Impossible’ principles of the Lorraine Monroe Leadership Institute (LMIL) as a guide to higher expectations, discipline and good study habits. The LMIL principles are also incorporated in the school’s positive approach to attendance and lateness. The school offers parent workshops, but these do not provide sufficient in-depth opportunities to ensure that parents have a clear understanding of their students’ learning goals and promote practices outside the school that focus on these goals.

The school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP) is the result of a collaborative process that involves administrators, teachers and parents. This plan is aligned to the State standards and school wide goals. The school’s progress towards CEP goals is discussed at the regular meetings of the school leadership team.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

This area of the school’s work is proficient.

The school’s core curriculum is mapped effectively and aligned to the State standards. This curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of academic stimuli such as monthly

attendance celebrations, book clubs, after-school academic support and Saturday programs. The curriculum is further enhanced by the music and arts programs which are closely link to the core subjects. Literacy instruction combines carefully guided instruction (SFA program) with elements of the workshop model such as leveled libraries to better support reading development. The teaching of writing follows the workshop model of Teacher's College. In science and social studies, students have classroom copies of the textbooks, but must rely on their own notes to review and study.

The importance of differentiation emphasized in the last Quality Review report is recognized by the staff, but its presence in the classroom is an emerging practice. For example, in a third grade math class, students were grouped by abilities but differentiation was limited to the type of worksheets that children were asked to complete. Children could explain the steps they followed to resolve a math problem, but were unsure when asked to explain the reason for those steps, or the rationale on which the process was based. For a higher-performing student, the work was very easy, but no extension activities or opportunities for independent work were provided. All students with IEPs in grade 4 were in the same class but, despite this homogenous grouping and smaller class size, there was no evidence of clearly differentiated instructional strategies.

The use of rubrics is a school-wide practice. They are displayed in the classrooms, on bulletin boards and can also be found in students' portfolios. However, the way teachers use rubrics to guide instruction and give feedback to students is inconsistent and not always effective. In a class in grade 6, the teacher had planned a very well thought out writing lesson that involved students in reviewing and responding to a set of student work samples with corresponding rubrics. However, the pace of the lesson was too quick for students to follow the teacher and to complete the work as intended. In a first grade class, the teacher showed a rubric to demonstrate the steps on how to use a thermometer, but she did not adhere to those steps when explaining the task to her students.

The principal is resourceful and creative in the use of the budget, staffing and scheduling. She has hired three assistant principals who are in the classrooms on a daily basis and responsible for the different academies. She has also invested in technology including SMART boards to promote active learning and differentiated instruction. Not all teachers and assistant principals are yet fully confident is using technology, but the structures and opportunities are available to enable the faculty to gradually incorporate them into their lessons and maximize their potential.

Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school's goals for accelerating student learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The principal and assistant principals know the staff well through formal and informal observations, visits and walkthroughs. They use this knowledge to tailor support for individual teachers in one-on-one meetings with their academy assistant principal. In addition, the principal meets individually with teachers twice a year. Appropriate professional development occurs in the classroom through the literacy and math coaches and outside consultants. Teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively and are also offered to attend training opportunities outside the classroom based on their own areas of interest. Whereas the impact of professional development is clearly observable in the school learning environment and in student assessment and

monitoring, it has yet to translate into increased academic rigor and differentiated instruction.

The formalized inquiry team of seven teachers is led by the director of curriculum, but most teachers in the school are involved in some form of inquiry work. The inquiry team meets weekly and has identified English language learners performing at the beginners or intermediate levels of English proficiency as its target group. As a result of data analysis and their academic work, the team is working to improve students' academic language. Although each member of the team has 'adopted' a student and monitors his or her progress, the actions of the team lack a coherent approach to change strategies towards clearly defined student goals.

The school has developed strong partnerships with outside agencies, which provide students with high-quality interventions and enrichments to support their academic and social development. The parent coordinator in collaboration with the school's curriculum specialists provide parent workshops on a regular basis and on a wide range of topics including parenting issues, school curriculum and graduation requirements. Parents are very supportive of the school and appreciate the parent training and opportunities available to them through the school and the school's partnership with nearby organizations.

Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

This area of the school's work is proficient.

The organization of the school into three academies, grades kindergarten to 2, 3 to 5 and 6 to 8, provides greater opportunities for academic support, teacher meetings and closer monitoring of students' progress. Although each of the three assistant principals is in charge of an academy, they are also responsible for a specific subject across grade levels. Based on the 2007-08 Progress Report, the school has identified English language arts as its priority. To that purpose, it has organized students in flexible groups for reading and has adopted the Success for All reading program while maintaining some components of the workshop model, particularly to teach writing. Teachers also use these data to examine subgroups and establish intervention and academic support services.

At this school, teachers maintain data binders with unit assessments, running records, periodic assessment data and other formative assessment results. The Acuity periodic assessment is used consistently across grades in both English language arts and math to determine interim checkpoints and to inform differentiated instruction in these subjects. In the areas of social studies and science, teachers rely primarily on end of unit assessments included in the textbooks and it is not clear how they use these data to make informed instructional decisions.

The principal has provided strong leadership in the development of a school's vision and she is actively involving staff in further developing it through a school wide book study of the bestseller, "Our Iceberg Is Melting" by John Kotter. The school's Comprehensive Educational Plan is well aligned with its strategic priorities. The principal runs building level meetings and attends grade level meetings to effectively monitor student progress. She makes organizational decisions including staff assignments, intervention schedules and professional development based on student needs. Following the recommendations

of the last year's Quality Review, the school is refining how to use data to improve differentiated instruction and provides professional development in this area. In addition, the school has successfully developed partnerships with outside organizations to support students' academic and social-emotional needs.

School Quality Criteria 2008-2009

School name: Sojourner Truth School	△	▷	✓	+
Overall QR Score			X	
Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, generate and analyze information on student learning outcomes and use it to understand what each student knows and can do, and to monitor the student’s progress over time.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty regularly...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
1.1 collect and analyze actionable information, including assessment results and attendance data, to provide a complete view of the learning outcomes and needs of individual students and groupings of students?				X
1.2 focus analysis on the learning outcomes and needs of all subgroups of students?			X	
1.3 engage in an open exchange of information with students and families about students’ learning needs and outcomes, including assessment results and attendance data?			X	
1.4 design or adapt tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance, identify trends and inform instructional and organizational decisions, and to enable students and their families to assess and track each student’s progress?		X		
Overall score for Quality Statement 1			X	
Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student’s next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student’s learning.				
<i>To what extent do school leaders and faculty...</i>	△	▷	✓	+
2.1 use collaborative and data-informed processes to set measurable, actionable and differentiated learning goals in core subjects for individual students and groupings of students and develop differentiated plans and timeframes for reaching these goals?			X	
2.2 use collaborative and data-informed processes to develop the school’s Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP)?			X	
2.3 ensure that the achievement of learning goals, and the implementation of plans and timeframes for reaching these goals, is the central focus of school leaders, faculty, students and families?		X		
2.4 communicate high expectations to all students and families, and involve students in developing their learning goals and plans and in taking their next learning steps?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 2			X	

DEFINITIONS

“**Analyze**” or “**analysis**” includes, but is not limited to, comparisons of:

- the current and past outcomes of . . . individual students, administrative groupings and subgroups of students and the school itself in core subjects;
- the outcomes of different classrooms and subgroups in the same grades and core subjects; and
- the school’s Progress Report and other outcomes to those of peer/other schools

“**Assessment results**” include student outcomes on summative assessments (e.g., state ELA, math, science and social studies tests, NYSESLAT, Regents Exams, and Performance Based Assessment Tasks) and formative assessments aligned to the school’s curriculum (including Periodic, DYQ, and teacher-developed Classroom Assessments).

“**Core subjects**” are ELA, math, science, social studies/history, the arts, foreign language, and physical education/health.

“**Data-informed processes**” include analysis of Progress Report, Quality Review, Learning Environment Survey, Inquiry Team findings, assessment results and attendance data

“**Groupings of students**” include classrooms, grade levels and high school cohorts.

“**Organizational decisions or strategies**” refer to a school’s use of budget and resources, staffing, planning, scheduling, grade structure, departments and teacher teams and other aspects of the school’s structure and organization that can affect student outcomes.

“**Subgroups of students**” include special education students, English Language Learners, the other NCLB subgroups, boys, girls, and other groups significant to the school.

Quality Statement 3 – Develop Coherent Instructional and Organizational Strategies: The school uses rigorous curricula, teaching and organizational decision making to engage students and faculty in meeting all students’ learning goals.

<i>To what extent do ...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
3.1 school leaders and faculty deliver challenging and engaging curricula in core subjects, including the arts, that are aligned to state standards?			X	
3.2 teachers plan and teach lessons that are differentiated to meet the needs of individual students and student groupings and are designed to enable all students to reach their learning goals?		X		
3.3 school leaders make strategic organizational decisions to support a coherent and rigorous instructional approach that enables students to reach their learning goals?			X	
3.4 school leaders maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			X	
Overall score for Quality Statement 3			X	

Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals for accelerating student learning.

<i>To what extent do school leaders...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
4.1 use their own observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of student outcomes to implement an explicit, differentiated strategy to improve each teacher’s instruction, with a special focus on new teachers?			X	
4.2 encourage teachers to take part in Inquiry Teams and other structured professional collaborations (informed by the examination of student work, assessment outcomes and their own peer observations) and share in the instructional leadership of the school with the goal of improved student learning?			X	
4.3 provide professional development that encourages teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve student outcomes?		X		
4.4 utilize youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 4			X	

Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.

<i>To what extent do...</i>	Δ	➤	✓	+
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes and its strategies for improving each teacher’s instructional practices include measurable interim goals and suitable time frames for evaluating success and making adjustments during the year?		X		
5.2 school leaders and faculty use interim checkpoints and data to inform lessons, improve curriculum, differentiate instruction and revise student learning plans throughout the year?			X	
5.3 school leaders use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of and modify organizational decisions, structured professional collaborations and teacher improvement strategies?			X	
5.4 school leaders and the school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to support academic, personal and professional growth?				X
Overall score for Quality Statement 5			X	

Quality Review Scoring Key							
Δ	Underdeveloped	➤	Underdeveloped with Proficient Features	✓	Proficient	+	Well Developed